

From: [Crossland, Ronnie](#)
To: [Fife, Greg](#)
Cc: [Petersen, Chris](#); [Webster, Susan](#); [McQuiddy, David](#); [Smith, Monica](#)
Subject: Fw: Fire in Athens TX DMN
Date: Thursday, May 29, 2014 9:29:54 PM

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Gray, David
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 9:12 PM
To: Curry, Ron; Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: RE: Fire in Athens TX DMN

Fire reported at site that stores fertilizer in Athens

By [Julie Fancher](#)

jfancher@dallasnews.com

[6:43 pm on May 29, 2014](#) | **Update at 8:28 p.m.:** The Associated Press is reporting that the fire, which is at a farm supply lot, appears to be burning itself out. At 7:30 p.m., aerial video showed that where there had been a 60-foot column of flames, there was little more than a smoking ruin framed by charred walls. Police said no injuries had been reported.

Firefighters are on the scene of a fire at an Athens fertilizer plant, which reportedly stores ammonium nitrate – the same fertilizer that caught fire and ignited a deadly explosion in another small Texas town last year.

Crews were called to the scene around 5:45 p.m. at the plant in the 300 block of West Larkin Street in downtown Athens, about 60 miles southeast of Dallas.

Police say crews have evacuated a five block radius. No injuries have been reported.

Police said there had not been an explosion, but Athens Mayor Jerry Don Vaught told WFAA-Channel 8 there was a “small boom.”

Ammonium nitrate is the chemical that exploded in West, Texas in April 2013. That blast killed 15 people, including a dozen first responders, and injured hundreds of others.

The chemical is used as a fertilizer to increase crop yield, but it can also be used as a cheap alternative to dynamite. Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, mixed it with fuel oil to blow up the federal building there.

In West, tons of ammonium nitrate overheated and blew up after a fire broke out at a fertilizer plant there.

Following the West explosion, officials in Athens took a closer look at the Larkin Street plant, which is near a middle school and the courthouse, *The Athens Daily Review* reported. The building that housed the operation is made of cinder block.



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The Athens fire chief [told the Daily Review](#) that the plant keeps ammonium nitrate on hand, but it is typically shipped out within a few days. He said in June he planned to do a site inspection. It's unclear whether that occurred.

"Our greatest tool is prevention," he said. "The best thing we can do is keep something from happening."

No new federal or state laws have been put in place since the explosion and fire on April 17, 2013. Guidelines for safely storing and handling the ammonium nitrate fertilizer that detonated were updated in August, but those lack regulatory authority.

President Barack Obama ordered a team of federal agencies that same month to review the nation's chemical oversight and recommend improvements. That process has yielded only tentative proposals.

Texas state Fire Marshal [Chris Connealy](#) scheduled meetings with local officials in 68 Texas counties about the dangers of ammonium nitrate. One of the meetings was held in Athens in March. The meetings are being held in counties with significant quantities of ammonium nitrate.

Committees in both the Texas House and Senate have been charged with looking into changes

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst has ordered Texas senators to review safety regulations and emergency response procedures in the aftermath of West.

The House Committee on Homeland Security has also met to discuss what changes might be made. Committee Chairman Joe Pickett has said lawmakers are unlikely to impose more permitting on chemical plants, suggesting that more power could be given to state inspectors.

Staff Writer Sarah Mervosh contributed to this report.

From: Curry, Ron
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 9:02 PM
To: Gray, David; Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

[Thank you for the updates.](#)

[Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.](#)

From: Gray, David
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:47 PM
To: Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

Lots of online press reports

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone .

From: gray.david@epa.gov
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:38 PM
To: Edlund, Carl; Edlund, Carl; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

Thanks

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone .

From: Edlund, Carl
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:37 PM
To: Edlund, Carl; Gray, David; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Cc: Phillips, Pam; Crossland, Ronnie
Subject: Re: Fire in Athens TX

Ronnie just called with an update. This facility MAY have ammonium nitrate so we are coordinatong with TCEQ on response actions needed.

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Edlund, Carl
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 8:26 PM
To: Gray, David; Coleman, Sam; Curry, Ron
Subject: Fw: Fire in Athens TX

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Fife, Greg <fife.greg@epa.gov>
Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2014 7:47 PM
To: R6 Response Notify
Subject: Fire in Athens TX

Fire in Athens, TX.

At approximately 6:15 CST, a fire broke out at what is reported to be East Texas Ag Supply. No explosion was reported.

EPA is still investigating and assessing the situation. It does appear that the fire is under control and about out. Material involved in the fire is not known to EPA at this time.

The facility is near downtown Athens, and separated from residences by only a railroad track. An evacuation was called by the County Sheriff.